

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Saint Mary's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Brookwood Meadow Killester Dublin 5
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60791A

Date of Inspection: 27-01-2017



WHAT IS A SUBJECT INSPECTION?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in History under the following headings:

1. Learning, teaching and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	25 and 27 January 2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Meeting with subject co-ordinator• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff.

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Saint Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School, Killester, is a Catholic voluntary secondary school for girls under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, as well as an optional Transition Year (TY). It caters currently for 305 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from satisfactory to good in the lessons observed; there is scope for improvement in the area of differentiation and the level of expectation communicated to students.
- Very good classroom management was evident and a very positive teacher-student rapport was observed in all lessons.
- In the majority of lessons, the dominant pedagogical approach was teacher-led exposition and questioning.
- The overall quality of assessment was satisfactory.
- The quality of whole-school support and subject provision is good; school management is very supportive of teachers' continuous professional development (CPD).
- A collaborative, collegial approach to subject planning for History was evident.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To build on the very good student-teacher rapport, teachers should communicate appropriately high expectations for all students.
- In order to cater for the varying needs and abilities of students, teachers should use more differentiated approaches.
- Questioning strategies should be integrated into all lessons that are inclusive of all students and that help to develop their critical thinking skills.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to satisfactory in the lessons observed; there is scope for improvement in the area of differentiation and the level of expectation communicated to students.
- A positive learning environment has been created with key-word posters and relevant historical material on display in each of the history rooms.
- Very good classroom management was evident and a positive teacher-student rapport was observed in all lessons. Building on this very good rapport, there is a need for teachers to communicate higher expectations for student attainment.
- Overall preparedness for the lessons observed was good. To structure the lesson content, teachers outlined to students the learning intentions or topic at the outset. This approach was most effective, in a few lessons, when the intention was expressed in terms of what students should know or be able to do and progress was assessed either during or at the end of lesson.
- During the lessons observed, good links were made to prior learning and in some instances with current events such as the effects of economic changes. Students were encouraged to express their opinions and some made meaningful connections between what they were learning in class and their own lives.
- In some lessons, teacher-designed handouts were used to facilitate short discursive tasks on topics such as the Plantations or the economy. While these appropriately provided a guide and structure to student discussion the same questions and tasks were assigned to all students. Teachers should be very mindful to differentiate content and tasks in a manner that will support and challenge all students.
- A positive feature of a few lessons was the use of video clips or images to engage students with primary sources. However, the dominant teaching approach deployed to interrogate these sources was teacher-led questioning. A more effective balance was observed in one lesson where students worked in pairs. This approach provided opportunities for students to discuss historical changes and allowed the teacher to provide additional support where needed. This practice should be extended.
- In the majority of lessons, the main pedagogical approach was characterised by teacher-led exposition and questioning. While this was used appropriately to give an overall assessment of student learning, a better balance between teacher and student input was achieved in some instances where students were encouraged to work in pairs or groups. The use of such collaborative learning strategies should be further incorporated into lessons to cater for the varying needs and abilities of students.
- The overall quality of assessment was satisfactory. In the majority of lessons, oral questioning was the dominant formative assessment practice used. However, questions tended to be lower-order, requiring very brief answers, with teachers then expanding on the answer themselves. It is recommended that questioning strategies should be integrated into all lessons that are inclusive of all students and that help to develop their critical thinking skills.

- Some good strategies associated with assessment for learning were observed in a few lessons, including the use of ‘traffic lights’ with junior students to enable them to assess their own progress and graphic organisers to consolidate learning. These types of approaches merit further use with all year groups.
- In the majority of lessons, homework was assigned frequently and in some instances, supportive formative comments from teachers were evident. Highly effective practice was noted when a homework task was used to engage students with new material independently to devise questions and answers before the lesson, which was then used as a class quiz. This pedagogical approach allowed students to demonstrate their general knowledge of the topic and provided the teacher with an opportunity to assess students’ overall understanding.
- There was good attention paid to the development of literacy in many lessons with an emphasis on keywords and the writing of extended answers. Teachers are encouraged to continue developing methodologies that support literacy and numeracy as these skills are very relevant to the study of History.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of whole-school support and subject provision is good, evidenced by the subject being compulsory in both junior cycle and TY, and part of an open subject choice for Leaving Certificate. Weekly timetable provision for History is appropriate.
- School management is very supportive of teachers’ continuous professional development (CPD) and encourages teachers to attend CPD events and to share good practice.
- All classrooms are well equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, including a data projector. The school is in the initial stages of developing a shared folder of resources on their intranet. Teachers and management are encouraged to link these resources with their schemes of work so that there is a greater alignment of learning outcomes with teaching and assessment methodologies, and resources.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning and preparation is good. A collaborative, collegial approach to subject planning for History was evident. A good-quality department plan outlines the provision and organisation of the subject in the school.
- A very interesting scheme of work has been prepared for TY with a good emphasis on local history. To ensure a consistent approach to assessment in TY and to support self and peer assessment methodologies teachers should develop an agreed approach to the assessment of oral presentations and research tasks that are assigned to students.
- Commendably, the history department conducts an annual analysis of student achievement in the certificate examinations compared to national norms. To benefit from this good practice, the department should identify specific actions that would support continued improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes the recommendations outlined in the report and is pleased that a positive learning environment and very good classroom management was evident in the classes observed. The Board also acknowledges that a very good rapport was observed between teachers and students and that the quality of subject planning was good and demonstrated a collaborative, collegial approach.

Since the school has focused in recent years on the development of literacy skills among the students, the Board is pleased that the inspector observed that good attention was paid to this in the lessons observed. Furthermore, a current priority of the school's improvement plan is the provision of formative feedback and evidence of this was also found in homework observed by the inspector in the course of the evaluation.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The Board is committed to school improvement and welcomes the recommendations provided by the inspector. Continuous Professional Development for all teachers has been arranged in the area of active teaching methodologies to support a more differentiated classroom. This will include an input on the effective use of questioning.

Raising expectations and communicating same remains a priority at the school and will feature as a discussion item on future staff and subject planning meeting agendas with a view to agreeing approaches and strategies that address this recommendation.

The time-table is being restructured from 2017 to reflect class periods of one hour in length. The objective of this change is to facilitate the incorporation of active teaching and learning methodologies into lessons allowing for a greater emphasis on collaborative learning methodologies. It will also facilitate the use of a greater variety of assessment modes to support the varying needs of students.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;